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NATIONAL FOREST ROADS AND TRAILS

A radio talk by R. D. Bennet, Division of Recreation, U. S. Forest Service, broadcast Friday, May 28, 1937, in the conservation day program, National Farm and Home Hour by 77 Stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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Roads and trails in the National Forests, are contributing more and more each year to human enjoyment. The National Forests today possess the majority of those outstanding native characteristics of American landscapes which so inspired Samuel Francis Smith to write "I love thy rocks and rills, they woods and templed hills."

To protect and conserve these wooded hills and valleys, to guarantee clear waters in the streams and rivers, and to make their scenic interests easily available to the American citizens, many roads and trails have been constructed throughout the National Forests. In the early part of the century, these large public lands were isolated and transportation had to be by foot or horseback and there were very few visitors, but the automobile has changed all of that and as the machine became important in our lives, many miles of good safe roads were built. They are meeting the demands of the motorist for pleasures as well as business. At the same time, travel on the trails by foot and horseback has become increasingly popular as many people are feeling the pioneering urge to rough it and to revel in the intimacy of nature which can be obtained so easily as one hikes and rides the trail through the woods. The greater part of the remaining wilderness in our country lies within the National Forests. Each year more people seek the beauty, the solitude, and the cool, fresh air which are found in these vast areas.

So it is that, as the demand of the public to visit and use the National Forests for pleasure increases, there are more roads and trails built so that a greater part of this great public resource can be made available. Where only a few years ago these benefits were known and enjoyed by a very few, today they are used by millions and there are more than 21,000 miles of National Forest highways and 73,000 miles of minor roads in addition to thousands of miles of trails.

The forest road is constructed quite differently now than in the past. Today it is of safe width and wide curves so that in the steep mountainous country where the urban visitor, accustomed to city streets and wide super-highways, once was subject to heart failure on account of the sharp curves, steep grades and narrow width - today that same person may drive and feel perfectly safe.

The Forest Service has learned that wise road and trail construction offers unlimited opportunity not only to preserve, but to enhance the natural charm of the National Forests; their scenic beauty and inspirational quality, the appeal of their primitive simplicity, the attractiveness of their lakes and streams; and the interest of their abundant wildlife. Such opportunity is being realized to the fullest practicable degree. These

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roads serve several purposes besides enhancing the recreation value of the forest. They facilitate administration, and the utilization of forest resources, and they are vitally important in protecting the forests from fire.

Forest roads and trails are made to harmonize with the surroundings. They are laid out in pleasing, sweeping curves following the contour of the land. Construction scars are healed over by planting and by grading flat slopes so that native plants will catch and grow. The roadsides are left in as natural a condition as possible by preserving the existing undergrowth and trees. Gravel banks and stone quarries, the source of the road material, are always located out of sight of the road and trails. The location is dependent not only upon good engineering practice, but also to take full advantage of points of interest - mountains, lakes, trees, rocks and the like.

Roads are kept well back from the shores of lakes and streams for these sites are the retreats of the recreationist and the sight or sound of motors may be unpleasant, but vistas are made here and there for the motorist to catch a glimpse or a full view of the water.

Every consideration is being given to gain a result which will be ever pleasing and which will contribute greatly to the public enjoyment of the National Forests.

Wise forest management has also dictated a very commendable policy regarding the areas bordering the roads and trails. For a varying width along both sides of all important roads and trails, a so-called scenic strip is reserved against any cutting of timber or construction of buildings, or any other disturbance to the natural conditions, so that as the motorist or hiker travels along, he is conscious always of being in an area where man's economic forces are not present. The width of these scenic strips vary with each type of forest, but the width is always sufficient to completely eliminate the view and quite often the sound of lumbering operations or other humanized activity.

The most enjoyable manner in which to travel the roads and trails of the National Forest is to go along leisurely selecting the particular form of enjoyment which you prefer. It may be motoring - stopping here and there at some observation point to view a distant panorama, a towering mountain, a lake nestling in the valley; or it may be to silently watch a deer or bear feeding, or it may be to stop in one of the numerous picnic areas along the road for lunch or to broil a steak over a wood fire, or to pitch a tent and camp beside a stream and fish to your heart's content. There are many other possibilities to meet almost any desire; botanizing among the forest trees, shrubs and flowers; studying the grotesque rock formations; hiking to the top of some high mountain and there to sit and view all the world at your feet and perhaps watch the sun go down over the distant purple hills. The person preferring a vigorous enjoyment, may hike or ride horseback on a pack trip of a week or more into the high country, climb steep trails and at night sleep under the stars; and for those who prefer just rest and relaxation from a noisy and restless urban life, there are numerous small retreats - quiet and beautiful.